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ABSTRACT

Trends in curriculum reform are traced, and a number of relevant publications are critiqued. Three volumes issued by the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies deal with the problems and issues of the college curriculum. One volume, by Frederick Rudolph, is a historical survey of the American undergraduate curriculum. A second volume deals with the major issues of the 1970s, and an undergraduate curriculum handbook duplicates much of what is in the other volumes. Curriculum improvement is addressed by Chickering, Halliburton, Bergquist, and Lindquist (1977) in a project for the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges. The handbook is designed for faculty and administrators. An effort that is helpful in defining the minimal competencies of a college graduate has been made by four scholars writing under the auspices of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (1977). A small volume by Boyer and Kaplan discusses the need for a core curriculum. A proposal for a core curriculum at Harvard University, a California task force's proposed changes in general education, and an effort at Columbia University to "reintegrate" the university through general education are noted. Belknap and Kuhns (1977) discuss general education, and innovations and attempted reforms of the past two decades are treated in a volume by Grant and Riesman (1978). Trends that are outlined in this newsletter include the current pressures toward unity after a period of much diversity. The shift in thinking about curricula represents a turning from change and innovation to reform and restructuring. (SW)

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CURRICULAR REFORM FOR THE 1980s*

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The current concern for curricular reform in higher education has been accruing for several years. Although curricular change is a continuous, ongoing activity on college and university campuses, there are occasions upon which the demand for broad ranging, intensive program modifications is clearly heard. Hefferlin (1969) has estimated that the curriculum changes, on the average, every 22 years through the addition of new courses and the eventual deletion of obsolete courses. New courses are more readily added, however, than old courses can be deleted. Faculty interests in research and scholarship and the changing expectations of students produce a continuing alteration of course content and requirements but seldom provide the pressure or momentum for a radical or innovative re-structuring of the curriculum itself.

Almost without exception, the stimulus for a significant, pervasive, and enduring change in the curriculum must come from without. New presidents, deans, or department heads often initiate curricular change but with highly varying results. Faculty committees, self-study groups, and other internal groups may study and recommend program changes—and occasionally, outside consultants, visiting boards, or study commissions can be successful in stimulating curricular revision. For the most part, however, the college curriculum is notorious for its imperviousness to sudden, undeliberate change. It is thought amenable to change only when gradual or incremental adjustments can be made without altering too quickly or too profoundly the basic structure of what is taught and learned in degree programs.

The 1960s and 1970s, nonetheless, have seen numerous efforts to bring about many changes in the organization, structure, and purpose of higher education. The late 1960s and early 1970s may eventually be recalled as the era of commission reports. Hardly a month passed during that brief period without some statement from a commission, panel, task force, or study group addressing the issues of higher education and advocating extensive or deep-running changes in the functions and activities of colleges and universities. Some of those recommendations were effective in changing the organizational or institutional arrangements under which higher education was offered. Courses were added, calendars rearranged, new instructional styles adopted, and other attempts made at polishing the tarnished image colleges and universities had acquired.

In retrospect, many advocated reforms of the period were ineffective because they did not adequately attack the structure and content of college curricula themselves. At the time change was very much taking place in the curriculum but it was a general softening or diffusion of academic requirements, course objectives, and educational standards. While deans and department heads were busy modifying the calendar, designating new majors, and advocating different organizational arrangements, many faculty members were conceding authority and responsibility for course content and academic standards, acquiescing in grade inflation as a logical consequence of other changes, and otherwise relinquishing instructional obligations to help students learn specific subject matter and general concepts. In many instances, the avowed distinctions between student and teacher became confused by the pandering rhetoric of the day. Students were said not only to be the curriculum but to be the best judge of how well they had learned what they wanted to learn. As for the classroom teacher, he or she fell ready victim to the absurd cliche that if the student had not learned, the teacher had not taught.

Some reactions to the curricular events of the past 15 years were predictable, if not inevitable. There is much about the period that suggests excess or needless zeal, and counterbalancing forces were sure to follow. Too many responses to the problems and issues of the 1960s were merely *ad hoc*. The complaints and accusations of protesting students were responded to with frightening literalness. In too many cases the demands of students were met with indulgent efforts bordering on the compulsive. Nowhere is this more obvious than in efforts to meet student demands for relevance. Many college instructors had to learn that neither the morning headlines nor the evening telecast could carry the content needed in a five-hour course. The instructor's teaching methods were often hobbled by relevance because both students and their interests changed too rapidly. Credit for active participation in presidential campaigns could only be given every four years; credit for other "relevant"

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learning experiences was often rejected by the students themselves once the novelty wore off. Whatever the solution to the problems of the 1960s might have been, "ad hocracy" in the curriculum was not a sustaining response.

CURRICULAR CHANGE AND INNOVATION

Current pressures for curricular reform can be interpreted as an effort to seek some semblance of unity after an incredible period of diversity. The turmoil of the past 15 years produced a clamorous concern for the plurality of clienteles seeking education and the diversity of courses and programs that could serve their demands and expectations. In this sense, much of the discussion can be understood as a reaction to the strong centrifugal forces that expanded higher education into postsecondary education, extended educational opportunities to unselected and heterogeneous populations, and brought about massive, if not universal, education beyond the high school.

The success or failure of curricular change and diversification need not be determined before centripetal forces come into play. It is reasonable, however, to infer that much of the concern for curricular reform is predicated on the perceived failure of many attempted innovations of the past decade and the various structural re-arrangements of the past 20 years. It is also predicated on certain anticipations of further change in the 1980s, the most telling of which is the projected decline in college-age students. In many respects, the shift in curricular thinking and discussion represents a turning from change and innovation to reform and re-structuring.

Although change and innovation have many attractive features, too much of the advocacy and rhetoric has been specious. When Archibald Cox looks upon 1968 students as "the best informed, the most intelligent, and the most idealistic this country has ever known," he is obviously not talking to the National Association of Manufacturers, the State of Georgia General Assembly, or the English and history departments of most American colleges. When young doctorates advocate widespread, sweeping changes in undergraduate education, they are either insufficiently attuned to the incentive-and-reward system of academe or they entered its ranks at a time when that system was failing to make its full strength known.

A CONCERN FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

It is highly significant that the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), despite issuing a hundred volumes on the problems and issues of higher education, did not deal with either learning or teaching to any appreciable degree. In a critical look at its work, Donald McDonald, executive editor of *The Center Magazine* (1973), took the Commission severely to task for ignoring teaching and curriculum in its six-million-dollar effort. McDonald cites Clark Kerr's opinion that the Commission could be neither effective nor helpful in matters of curriculum and instruction because of college and university faculties. To McDonald, this meant that no matter how detailed and massive the Commission's work, it was left without a center of gravity. Kerr stated, however, that the work of the Commission might be continued by the Carnegie Corporation in a somewhat different form and that this may give "a second opportunity to look into teaching and content."

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies obviously extends the work of CCHE and has made a commendable effort to look at problems and issues of the college curriculum. The Council has issued a trilogy in which it believes the important problems and issues to be critically examined. In a historical survey of the American undergraduate curriculum, Frederick Rudolph (1977) has brought the perspective of an accomplished historian to what has been taught and learned in American colleges over the years. He discusses in good fashion the development of higher education from its "beginnings" at Harvard College in 1636. Rudolph's book is informative and gives a much needed perspective to the difficulties of curriculum development. More meaningful, however, for the purposes of faculties dealing with curricular matters will be the last chapter, appropriately entitled "The Last Fifty Years." It is more or less Rudolph's thesis that the 20th century has seen such a diversity of "purpose, style, and institutional form that the word curriculum becomes a concept of convenience rather than precision." (p. 244)

Rudolph believes the liberal arts as "a set of values and expectations, let alone subject matter," have lost much of their meaning in the 20th century. Electives have continued to enlarge their domain despite efforts to offset abuses of the elective system. The B.A. degree became, quite early in his estimation, an umbrella degree. By 1930 the state universities of the mid-West were offering 46 baccalaureate degrees that were "intentionally job descriptive." By 1976, concentration was in charge of the curriculum with guidance, testing, and counseling being one notable response to the increased demands for specialization and "vocationalism" in curricula. Each improvement in concentration, Rudolph contends, drew attention to the failure of the curriculum to support or define general education, and dramatic experiments in general education did not succeed in turning the focus of the curriculum from the special to the general. In the sciences where the failure of distribution has been most noticeable, faculty displayed little interest in the general education of non-scientists, and scientific illiteracy became a characteristic of college educated Americans sometime toward the middle of the century.

Other observations made by Rudolph include the following view of change in the late 1960s and early 1970s:

> As unsettling as it was to the serenity of college and university campuses, the student movement of the 1960s wrought no great transformation either in the

curriculum or in the lecture system. The movement, whatever its source, was not an attack on the curriculum or on instruction as such. (p. 270)

In concluding his historical survey, Rudolph suggests that the changing job market for college graduates is not necessarily bad news.

> The time may be at hand when a reevaluation of academic purpose and philosophy will encourage the curricular developments that will focus on the lives we lead, their quality, the enjoyment they give us, and the wisdom with which we lead them. If such a development does take place, human beings, as distinct from trained technicians, will not be at a disadvantage in the job market. And perhaps, once more, the idea of an educated person will have become a usable idea. (p. 289)

PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

"Missions of the College Curriculum" is very much the missing volume in the work of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. The volume deals with the major issues of the 1970s and presents much useful information for understanding curricular problems and possibilities. This particular volume is issued as a commentary of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1977).

The commentary is issued within a context of "considerable change" in college curricula; "changes of substantial significance" in the composition and capacities of students; and a perspective of "no-growth" for higher education but fundamental social changes for society. At the same time the Foundation is aware that curricular review is never easy, that many forces are at work in shaping the curriculum and that most campuses have few "effective mechanisms" for examining the curriculum in its entirety.

> The curriculum always has been, and presumably always will be, in flux, but more at some times than at others. There are eternal points of tension: scholarships versus training; attention more to the past or to the present or to the future; integration versus fragmentation; socialization into the culture versus alienation from the culture; student choice versus institutional requirements; breadth versus depth; skills versus understanding versus personal interest; theory versus practice; ethical commitments versus ethical neutrality; among others. These conflicts are now temporarily adjusted now one way and now another; but they never cease. There are no easy or permanent solutions. (pp. 1-2)

Other observations made by the Carnegie Foundation help set the stage. They do not believe the curriculum is the most important aspect of undergraduate education—but rather the faculty. No studies show that one undergraduate curriculum is clearly better than another. The most marked characteristic of higher education is diversity, and the curriculum grows through accretion—"bean by bean."

While it is customary to divide the curriculum into three components: general education, the major, and electives, the Carnegie Foundation believes that general education has three quite separate components. These are advanced learning skills, breadth or distribution courses, and integrative or synoptic courses. Each kind of course serves different purposes. It is their contention, one expressed much earlier by Clark Kerr in the Carnegie Commission's work, that general education is now a disaster area. General education is on the defensive and has been losing ground for over a hundred years. But:

> Fortunately, intellectual trends are now in the direction of integration, particularly in the areas of bio-chemistry, behavioral sciences, and in systems and operations analysis. We have been through a period when knowledge was fragmented but dreams of coherence survived. Throughout history, intellectuals, field by field, and over many fields, have sought to create an intellectual hold after a period of fission. We seem to be entering a period of new attempts at synthesis. (p. 13)

> The curriculum is the major statement any institution makes about itself, about what it can contribute to the intellectual development of students, about what it thinks is important in its teaching service to society. It deserves more attention and merits less neglect than has been accorded it by most institutions of higher education in recent years. (p. 18)

In brief, what is needed is the development of coherent educational policies. Attention to these policies is by now a high priority and the curriculum of the future should be the consequence of sustained thought. Special effort should be made in the areas of improving basic skills, relating education to the world of work, and in stimulating moral values.

HANDBOOKS AND OTHER TOOLS

As the much heralded third leg of the Carnegie Council's curriculum stool, its "Handbook on Undergraduate Curriculum" is a disappointment and suffers greatly from comparison with the other two volumes. The contents duplicate much of what is said with better style and tone by Rudolph and by Verne Stadtman, who evidently was the principal draftsman of the Carnegie Foundation commentary. Some of the information is gratuitous and perhaps included only because the volume is called a handbook.

The primary difficulty of the volume may be that in its guise as handbook, the effort attempts too much without the benefits of multiple authorship. Part One is a topical treatment of such matters as general education, majors or fields of concentration, tests and grades, and methods of instruction. Each treatment has good points that are offset by glaring deficiencies. For example, the chapter

on tests and grades summarizes some sound advice on the construction and use of classroom exams but falls quite short of being an adequate treatment of the subject. The chapter on methods of instruction opens with the unfounded statement that "Until recently, very little was known about learning" and then treats instruction in a manner that ignores most of what has been published in recent years.

Part Two leaves much to be desired in its handling of comparative and historical perspectives. The author's choice of "modern philosophers of the university" is puzzling and will leave many readers with a highly distorted notion of forces and influences in the development of the undergraduate curriculum. His choice of "recent, radical, or rejected" critics or advocates is even more puzzling, both because of inclusions such as E. F. Schumacher and exclusions such as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' distinguished but ineffectual Assembly on University Goals and Governance.

The Carnegie Council handbook is on much better footing in discussing curriculum highlights from 1900-1964 and current highlights since 1965. Here can be found information that deans, departmental chairmen, and faculty committees might find both interesting and useful. What the latter chapter may demonstrate best, however, is the somewhat urgent need for assessing and evaluating the many curricular changes initiated in the early seventies or late sixties. There is too much in the handbook and other reportorial accounts of new departures in curriculum building that suggest major, sometimes radical redirections of structure and content have been successul when, in fact, they have not.

Perhaps the weakest chapter in the Carnegie Council handbook is the discussion of strategies for curriculum change, stages of change, and participants and elements that are involved in successful change. If the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education avoided curriculum and instruction because of the difficulties in tilling fields properly belonging to the faculty, later discussion dealing with faculty development has been incredibly naive about methods and procedures that might be used to revise academic programs and to improve classroom instruction. Much of the discussion concerning "change models" and "change agents" hint at "alternative futures" that cannot be derived from any past or presence known to many observers and skeptics.

Also of dubious value is the inclusion of one chapter dealing with undergraduate curricula "around the world" and a chronological history of "undergraduate education" from ancient Greece to the present. Especially questionable is a glossary that begins with the specialized term "abitur" and ends with an unnecessary definition of "written evaluations." The real strength and contribution of the handbook may be reached in one of the appendices where excerpts from almost a dozen major documents are presented.

A more helpful approach to curriculum improvement can be found in Chickering, Halliburton, Bergquist, and Lindquist's (1977) effort for the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges. Ostensibly "a handbook for faculty and administrators," this volume provides better insight into the needs and conditions of curriculum reform. More important, there is much that can serve the purposes of deans and faculty concerned with revisions in their academic offerings. Chickering deals with rationales for curricular change, while Halliburton discusses paradigms and patterns for curricular design. The distinctiveness of college curricula is discussed by Bergquist and a taxonomy of curricular designs may well prove useful despite the unappealing labels chosen for identification. Lindquist is more explicit and helpful than the Carnegie Council handbook in discussing strategies for change and approaches the task of curricular revision in terms of institutional problem solving.

Appendices in the CASC handbook include actual descriptions of the eight curricular models identified by Bergquist; several brief sketches of "innovative college curricula"; and four identified curricular planning tools that are adequately treated. Despite a tendency to emphasize technique at the expense of deliberative process, there is much about the CASC handbook that can be recommended. It is unfortunate, nonetheless, that neither the CASC handbook nor the Carnegie Council handbook is deserving of the title "handbook." Cynics, skeptics, and mossbacks can only shudder at the nature and quality of any undergraduate program that might be derived from the concepts and principles of curriculum development as they are presented in the two volumes. Other sources, tools, and assistance must surely be used by any faculty seriously interested in making curricular changes.

DOMINANT CONCERNS AND ISSUES

Two dominant concerns can be identified in the discussion of undergraduate curricula. One is a concern for minimal competency in basic academic skills. The other is a recognized need for core curricula, a re-vitalization of the liberal arts, or a reaffirmation of general education. Both concerns have been articulated by engaging advocates and have been rebutted by others who see such concerns as mere reaction without substance or content of their own.

The concern for minimal competency can be seen in state legislation requiring high school graduates to pass tests of basic literacy before graduation. Its counterpart at the college and university level can be seen in testing programs for sophomores and in the use of comprehensive exams for graduating seniors. The University System of Georgia has for several years required tests of reading and writing for "rising juniors" in its two-year, four-year, and university-level institutions. In its commentary, the Carnegie Foundation has emphasized the need for basic academic skills and recommended the use of comprehensive exams for seniors.

A commendable effort to define the minimal competencies of a college graduate has been made by four scholars writing under the auspices of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (1977). This brief essay states clearly that while higher education is not concerned merely with basic skills, there are general skills of writing, reading, speaking and calculating that are crucial

to a college education. Specific examples are given of the functional literacy that should be evident in reading, writing, speaking, and mathematical skills. In addition to basic competencies, the essayists believe there are basic understandings that are fundamental to education beyond high school. College graduates should know the basic structure and tenets of American government; those facts of history and geography that give the student an awareness of self in time and place; basic scientific principles and technological applications; and fundamental concepts of economics. In addition, they should have some experience with literature and some facility in construing education as a continuing, self-directed, life-long process.

Along with indispensable skills and basic understandings, there are special attributes that are not fostered by any single academic discipline but the total collegiate experience. These include critical thinking, moral sensibility, and personal awareness.

Much more publicized but much less substantive is a small volume by Ernest Boyer and Martin Kaplan (1977). It is their contention that American higher education must build, or rebuild, a core curriculum. Diversity stands as "an honorable component" of American history but it is a story with an unhappy sequel.

Boyer and Kaplan draw heavily from Stephen Bailey's (1976) *Phi Delta Kappa* volume on the purposes of education and his efforts to develop a notion of life-long education tied to the predictable stages of human development. Boyer and Kaplan would have the curriculum emphasize what pluralistic students hold in common. The content of the common curriculum would include those "events, individuals, ideas, texts, and value systems that have contributed consequentially to human gains and losses." (p. 62) To a common heritage, they would add common challenges of the present such as our interactions with the institutions that shape much of our behavior and values, and our common roles as producers and consumers. Finally, they would include the ethical choices that must be made in sharing a common heritage and in meeting common challenges.

Greatly publicized has been the proposal for a core curriculum at Harvard University. The proposal was approved recently by the Harvard faculty by a substantial majority and presumably signifies a return to "basic literacy in major forms of intellectual discourse." Beginning in 1982, Harvard undergraduates will be required to meet the new requirements for a baccalaureate degree and will devote almost one-fourth of their undergraduate work to literature, arts, social and philosophical analysis, and other courses designed to insure strength in basic academic skills and areas.

In California, a task force for the State University and College System has proposed changes in general education that presumably will achieve "unity and curricular coherence." The proposal of this task force would increase the number of general education units required of all students in the California system. The intent evidently is to broaden the exposure students receive in basic or fundamental disciplines and to increase basic skills and competencies in academic work.

Less publicized than the Harvard effort has been a continuing effort at Columbia University to "reintegrate" the university through general education. Belknap and Kuhns (1977) argue persuasively that general education needs to be considered in light of the narrow specialization and barren training that now characterize education. These authors define general education as the opposite of training and contend that we train doctors, lawyers, historians, or physicists but that we should educate human beings. They believe that American universities have changed aimlessly in response to a series of crises and must now find ways to handle a new array of problems. They further believe that universities and colleges are confused about what kinds of ignorance are now unacceptable. Academic disciplines are highly fragmented and isolated from each other, resulting in something of a contradiction whereby training is given a place of honor over education. Columbia University apparently copes with "a widespread mindlessness" through courses that are self-consciously planned to introduce students to western culture. They believe that this system has survived more or less intact since World War II and is now adapting to the intellectual and administrative pressures of the 1970s. General education seminars may be said to be the heart of the Columbia University system and that institution is now in the process of organizing "teaching companies" to restore coherence to the curriculum.

THE FAILURES OF EXPERIMENT

In a volume that should be required reading for academic deans and teaching faculty, Gerald Grant and David Riesman (1978) have studied at close hand the innovations and attempted reforms of the past two decades. They discuss in appreciable detail the reforms attempted at St. John's College, Kresge College, and the College for Human Services. They also discuss New College at Sarasota, the cluster college effort of the University of California at Santa Cruz, and the experimental public colleges of New Jersey—Stockton and Ramapo.

The gist of Grant and Riesman's work may well be that experiment and reform have been tried; have been found quite interesting and sometimes exciting; and have failed. There can be no doubt that many institutions in recent years have tried to change the basic purposes of collegiate education and have done so in creative ways. Grant and Reisman classify such "telic reforms" as neoclassical revivals, communal-expressives, and activist-radical impulses. St. John's College provides a case study of the first; Kresge College at Santa Cruz is a case study of the second; and the College for Human Services is a case study of the third.

It is Grant and Riesman's conclusion that universities—our "modern secular cathedrals"—remain strong and retain their hegemony over other institutions. Experimenters and reformers have won relatively few adherents and have met "only mixed success." Where they have succeeded, it has been through a partial incorporation of their aims, goals, and purposes within the modern university itself. The university can add new

functions with a relative ease because it is a pluralistic institution where "different sects may worship at the side altars." (p. 355) No other book published on curricular matters within the last several years deserves a closer reading than Grant and Riesman.

THE CHANGING CURRICULUM

The current concern for curricular reform and reconstruction may be interpreted in several ways. It is quite possible to fall back on the notion that the college curriculum is always changing and that what can be seen and heard in the late 1970s is no more than an increased awareness of what goes on all the time. Yet many observers believe that recent developments in curricular reforms represent a "renewed enthusiasm for order" and signal "a growing trend."

A close look at the events and developments of the past 15 years suggests that much of the current discussion follows from an awareness of failure. It is not cynical to conclude that many innovations were attempted without deliberate planning or critical analysis. Bandwagon effects have swept through college campuses with something less than healthy skepticism from undergraduate faculty and students. Fads and fashions in curriculum development can be detected.

A second sense of failure comes from the fact that the expansion of educational opportunity has been accompanied by test score decline and grade inflation. Neither event should have surprised knowledgeable educators, but both have surprised and disappointed many who had high expectations for the eventual outcomes of growth and expansion. Neither students nor curricula have proved as malleable as the optimism of the early 1960s implied. Good intentions have frequently gone astray.

But given the energetic and ambitious actions of the past 15 years, some form of reaction would seem inevitable. The metaphor of a swinging pendulum need not be overworked to imagine a returning urge for continuity and stability after an intense period of change and uncertainty. For those who prefer linear progressions, there can yet be hope that the restoration of core curricula or general education courses can be a spiraling effect that carries curriculum development to a higher plane of discourse and accomplishment.

In any event, there should be no doubt that the nature and content of the discourse in 1978 are different from the advocacy and rhetoric of the 1968-1972 period. Whether this change represents a shift from conflict back to consensus is yet to be decided. A preferable interpretation of the curricular turmoil might be the continuing tension between being and becoming in western civilization. Franklin Baumer (1977), a historian, may have said it best:

> Civilization demands, surely, a healthy mixture of becoming and being, the former to guarantee, not merely continuing criticism, but fresh forms of creativity; the latter to provide continuity and direction. But how to find being again, at least in any widely accepted sense, in an age of becoming is a puzzlement. This is the supreme problem of the twentieth century. (p. 23)

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